

## ***INVENTING THE POSSIBLE***

### **AN EPHEMERAL VIDEO LIBRARY**

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Presented in 2010 under the title *Faux Amis* (False Friends), the first edition of the Jeu de Paume's "ephemeral video library" focused on the representation of history in contemporary video, as seen from the perspective of memory, identity and loss. Mingling documentary and fiction, the works chosen question our notion of historical reality through narrative forms which, far from laying any claim to the "veracious", choose to be "falsifying".

Similarly built around the concepts of the "falsifying narrative" and the "power of the false" developed by Gilles Deleuze in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985), this second edition sets out to explore the potentiality-space situated between history and narrative – between *history* and *story* – and to suggest the invention of a possible future transcending the boundaries of the utopian. Without such a future the brutal abruptness of the return to reality would be irrevocable, a point Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño presses home in his First Infrarealist Manifesto of 1976: "We dreamt of utopia and we woke up screaming." Thus do the twenty-six works making up the video library explore, with varying degrees of humour or sense of tragedy, our bafflement in the face of the utopias that succeeded each other up until the close of the twentieth century.

Documentaries and fictions, animated films, experimental and performance videos: these products of the new millennium have in no way interrupted the – often intense – dialogue with the reality, movements and events of the preceding century. This "ephemeral video library" is intended above all as a provisional archive of videos made over the last ten years in extremely varied contexts and territories: from the Kuwait desert to the Amazon forest and including northern Canada, Bangladesh, Senegal and Indonesia. In narratives often shot through with mystery they put our epoch on display, with all its doubts and uncertainties. Their time frame is equally rich in possibilities: the themes tackled by their makers are frequently in the conditional perfect tense – "this would have been" – but also, and most often, in the desire-triggering future perfect of "this will have been". In combination these two tenses fracture the linearity of the relationship between past, present and future within which fiction creates a zone of indeterminacy.

Considered in the light of these potential temporalities, the past can lose that "historical truth" so far taken for granted; which leaves us free to imagine possible futures

within the spectrum of the impossible and thus invent a post-utopian future. This project challenges not only the way the metaphorical power of the image contributes to our apprehension of the world; it also summons us to think about whether we can still devise models for change, or with alternatives. What the works selected have in common is their intention to mobilise new energies, to construct imaginative possibilities that may, one day, be fulfilled. Interestingly, “imagine” in the original Latin – *imaginari* – means “to picture inventively to oneself”.

While not proposing unequivocal answers, these videos give expression to issues that frequently intersect: the imprint of education, reflections on the concept of “community”, reassessment of the past and ecological awareness.

Wendy Morris asks us to envision a childhood more closely linked to the real world and providing a better preparation for adulthood. Theo Eshetu, echoing the context of the Jeu de Paume – on Place de la Concorde, facing the Luxor Obelisk – sees the recent return of the Aksum Obelisk to its home country as a potential source of consequences for today’s society.

Initially the video by Edgardo Aragón Díaz may seem just a plea for pity for zoo animals, but it quickly becomes clear that this work is principally about the alienation felt by so many people in Europe. This highly charged subject – shared dreams are rediscovered, only to be shattered by the harsh reality of Europe today – is also the focus of works by Mahdi Fleifel, Hayoun Kwon, Daniela Ortiz and Xosé Quiroga. By contrast Yang Fudong’s film seems to be suggesting the establishment of a separate thought community as an alternative strategy for living.

In a humorously bittersweet vein, Pauline Horovitz demonstrates that the building of a cohesive society on an equitable social contract calls for more than just collective citizen determination: our vigilance must not falter in the face of the intolerance, imperialism and megalomania ever-present in our societies. In a number of the works, among them those by Carlos Motta, Peter Friedl, Declinación Magnética, Anxiong Qiu, Atsushi Wada and Allan Sekula, these spectres from the past loom as warnings against atrocities none of us can be sure we will never see again. Artur Żmijewski puts us face to face with the disturbing beauty of a Havana unable to shed the traces of indoctrination, while Eric Baudelaire alerts us to a very different cultural conception of image content, one linked to the geopolitical context in which images are actually received: the censorship they are subject to makes us stop and think about how we should react to the value attributed to them in different places. The same is true of Naeem Mohaiemen, who shows just how vigorously and rapidly values can evolve within a given society, and of Martin Le Chevallier, who draws us into a compelling socio-mental

experiment.

Several of the works in *Inventing the Possible* address the question of the power paradoxically regained by nature in an era increasingly identified as the Anthropocene: the period when the impact of human activity on the ecosphere becomes so significant that nature begins to react in unpredictable ways. At the same time horrific situations can find a reassuring outcome as humanity recovers its strength at the most desperate moments: Ursula Biemann's study of Bangladesh; animals surviving in the desert in Kuwait (Wim Catrysse); and people carrying on their lives undeterred by a seemingly imminent apocalypse (Khvay Samnang). Marine Hugonnier takes a reflective look at nature as enigma in a challenge to the purely scientific stance adopted by modern humans. And for Yto Barrada the botanical garden becomes a place for meditation on the human condition.

The other common factors in these videos are love of one's fellow humans – as in the contributions of Els Opsomer, Sirah Foighel Brutmann and Eitan Efrat – and friendship that endures beyond the grave, as in Hito Steyerl's video, a work that convinces us that no quest is impossible if one truly believes in it.

The enormous potential of contemporary video hinges on the fact that technology brings limitless access to images, words and sounds, together with inexhaustible combinations within the movement of the artwork: the spectators can choose either to immerse themselves in this dynamic, or to keep a certain distance.

As an open-ended structure the ephemeral video library offers total freedom of viewing choice. Within this variable cluster encounters can take place that offer not only a different perspective on today's history and reality, but also the possibility of sharing a potential future. This future may never come about, however, for it is conditional: it will depend on potentialities that will or will not be fulfilled.

*Translated from the French by John Tittensor*